
Iowa Legislative Services Agency Fiscal Services

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Community College Management Information System

ISSUE

Legislators and legislative staff have identified several issues of concern regarding the Community College Management Information System.

AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Education, Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation

CODE AUTHORITY

Chapter 260C, Code of Iowa

BACKGROUND

In the mid-1990s, the General Assembly, recognizing the need for consistent statewide data from the community colleges, provided funding to develop and implement a management information system (MIS) in the Department of Education's Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation. A total of \$270,000 was allocated to the project over two years from the standing appropriation for the Educational Excellence Program in FY 1995 and FY 1996.

The Department of Education defines the purpose of the MIS as follows:

“ . . . to collect data electronically from the community colleges to provide information about credit and non-credit students, credit student awards, programs and courses, human resources, and community college finances, and improvement and accountability of the system.”

The Department established the MIS in December 1997 and began compiling baseline data. At the end of each fiscal year, the colleges file reports updating the data in the MIS. With this data, the Department produces a series of annual reports, including:

- Certified budgets for each of the colleges and a statewide summary
- Fall credit enrollment

- Tuition and fees
- Condition of Iowa Community Colleges
- Year-End Summary

In the early years of implementation, there were problems with inconsistencies in data reporting between the colleges. The Department has continued to work to alleviate those inconsistencies through collaboration with the colleges. The Department provides training for community college staff and has developed detailed documentation for the preparation and reporting of data.

Of particular concern to the General Assembly has been the consistent and timely reporting of enrollment data in order to determine distribution of State aid to each college. Also of concern has been the need for enrollment projections and the consistency, availability, and comparability of financial data.

CURRENT SITUATION

Consistency – The Department has made strides in improving the consistency and comparability of data submitted by the colleges for the MIS, and past concerns have been addressed.

Timeliness – The Department continues to work to improve turnaround time for the five major reports published using MIS data.

- The Certified Budget Report is published in May of the preceding fiscal year.
- The Fall Credit Enrollment Report and the Tuition and Fees Report are usually published in November. This is an improvement over the past and no longer interferes with distribution of State aid. However, it does cause difficulties for the Legislative Services Agency (LSA) during the budget analysis process. The Department budget request is submitted in October, but the data needed to provide analysis of the request is not available until November.
- The Condition of Iowa Community Colleges Report is published in January of the subsequent year, as is the Year-End Summary.

One of the difficulties relating to the timeliness of reporting data is the Department's requirement that these reports be published at the time they are presented as an agenda item for the State Board of Education. Due to budget reductions and other considerations, the State Board of Education no longer meets monthly. Four of the five documents are prepared in the fall, while the Board does not meet in October and December. It would be possible to publish some or all of the documents a month earlier if this scheduling problem was resolved.

Projections and Trend Analysis – The Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation has indicated that it would not be possible to produce meaningful enrollment projections for the community college system. While the Department uses the number of births to develop enrollment projections for the K-12 education system, the Division cites a lack of similar data upon which to base community college projections. The LSA proposes that a thorough analysis of trends in enrollment, high school graduation, transition to higher education, the economy, and other areas could produce meaningful information upon which to base decisions regarding the community college system.

Financial Reporting – Currently, the year-end financial report that colleges file with the Department includes only limited information on restricted revenues and expenditures, those limited to specific purposes. In recent years, legislators have indicated an interest in reviewing the complete financial positions of the colleges, which requires detailed information on restricted funds. This would require the Department to expand the year-end financial report to request more data from the colleges.

ALTERNATIVES

The General Assembly may wish to consider the following alternatives:

- Provide direction to the Department regarding the timely publication of documents. As long as the State Board of Education does not meet at least monthly, the Department should consider releasing publications upon completion, rather than delaying until the next Board meeting agenda is released. This would not preclude the Board from discussing the information at the next meeting.
- Direct the Department to begin the process of identifying trends and compiling baseline data to develop a program of trend analysis and to provide future projections regarding community college enrollment and programming needs.
- Direct the Department to expand the year-end financial reports submitted by the colleges to include detailed information on restricted revenues and related expenditures and to report such data annually.

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